

Lehi's First Celebration needed a Flag

John K. Haws Jr.

Whether it is a celebration on Independence Day or Pioneer Day, the American Flag is a most important part of the celebration. It is a tear jerking experience to drive down, on any holiday, the flag lined street of a community's Main Street. Parades are lined with people waving American Flags and dressed in colorful red, white and blue t-shirts and hats. The Parades always begin with the formal color guard marching with the beautiful American flag trimmed in gold, waving in the breeze. The anticipated excitement noises quiets as complete street stand up and pay tribute to this "Grand Old Flag". But what would happen if we did not have a flag?

Such was the case with the City of Lehi for their first parade on the 24th of July, 1854. The City of Lehi had no American Flag. There was no flag to lead the parade.

Why was it so important to have a flag? Hadn't the pioneers escaped the United States to find a place that they could have their own space. When the pioneers arrived in the Salt Lake Valley, it was a part of Mexico. The whole states of California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas was part of Mexico. It stayed that way until the United States entered into war with Mexico in 1846. The Mormon Battalion were players in this war. In 1848, Mexico lost this area to the United States and Utah Territory became part of the United States. The pioneers of Lehi were concerned that they did not have a flag to begin the parade with. No American flag existed in the community at that time.

James Harwood, father of the famous Lehi and Utah artist, James T. Harwood, decided he was going to do something about it. (Harwood's paintings are found in the Springville Museum of Art). James Harwood decided he was going to make his own. He got white domestic material for the flag base. He made red paint from a substance taken from the red quarries of Utah The blue paint was formed with iindigo, an agricultural crop which was readily available; grown on

Southern plantations. He painted the blue background, sewed on gold stars, and divided the flag with red stripes against the white stripes formed from the color of the material. James Harwood had come to the rescue of the townspeople. The people were so excited as this simple home-made flag was carried at the beginning of the first parade in Lehi. You can imagine those Lehi Pioneer families as they stood and put their hand on their heart as the flag marched down the dirt covered streets on the first celebration of Lehi in their new homes.

Two years later, in 1856, another crisis arose around the flag. Lehi did not have a flag pole. Lehi was going to have a patriotic program as part of the celebration. Many citizens were upset that there was no flag for the gathering. William Dawson, known in town as "Uncle Billy" came to the aid. He went to West Canyon with his horses and wagon and fetched a long tall pine pole. He carved and carefully prepared the pole. and installed it on the north east corner of the Meeting House lot. The Meeting house was the first pioneer meeting place built in Lehi. Lehi was going to have their patriotic program. Uncle Billy had made sure his Lehi friends had their flag pole to celebrate their country. It became known as the "Liberty Pole" and lasted for patriotic programs until 1893 when it was deemed unsafe.

Another crisis came with the flag two years later. This same flag was leading a parade of soldiers, who represented a country at war with the Lehi pioneers. Brigham's Young's order of the evacuation of Salt Lake Valley had the Lehi Meeting House and all schools and homes full of saints from the Valley. It was described that you couldn't even walk with all the people sleeping on the floor of the Meeting House. Lehi sent men to fight the United States Military, but grateful, this army came through the Salt Lake Valley without a skirmish. Many Lehi citizens went west of Lehi which is now Redwood Road to see the military march through. The army was led by that American Flag. Imagine the the astonishment as " 5, 606 men, 16,000.000 pounds of freight including 3,500 wagons, 40,000 oxen and 1,000 mules plodded on down and turned toward

Cedar Fort.

On November 9, 1858 the western skies were filled with gun fire-a tribute to the thirty two states of the Union. Patriotic music and speeches were spoken as the United States flag was raised above their completed army camp. Camp Floyd was named for Secretary of War, John B. Floyd. He was in the cabinet of President James Buchanan.

That next July 24th, Salt Lake City did not hold their celebration and parade because of the evacuation. A large group of officers had traveled to the Salt Lake Valley to witness the spectacle of the parade that they had heard so much about. They were disappointed on finding no celebration.

It did not stop the Town of Lehi. Lehi had the same parade, led by the same flag and had the same patriotic program in front of the Meeting House and raised the flag on Uncle Billy's Liberty Pole. Even in adverse conditions, Lehi still supported the red, white and blue.

In 1861, at the beginning of the Civil War, Camp Floyd and Johnston's Army was dissolved. Everything was torn down and sold to pioneer buyers, eager for great deals. Soldiers returned individually to their homes not as the large parade that had come into the Valley three years earlier.

The Camp Floyd flag was lowered, for the last time, with similar pomp and ceremony as it was when it was raised. The 32 gun salute to the states was repeated. They sang patriotic songs. Their band performed patriotic numbers. They piled up a large collection of gun boxes and weapons and ammunitions. They were started on fire to blow up the final amounts of ammunition. An explosion occurred similar to fireworks that we experience in today's celebration. Then the flag was retired for the last time. The flag was taken to Salt Lake and presented to President Brigham Young. This was a fitting ending to the Utah War.

Today Lehi has a flag and a flag pole . Lehi's parade begins with the American Flag. So

does all the communities in Utah. The flag still is a beacon for all of us to celebrate. May we always begin our celebrations with the Grand Red, White and Blue.!